

**Yuma County Department of Public Works Somerton Material Source (AZA 32602)**

Dear Interested Party:

Please be advised that an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared (EA-AZ-320-2005-008) for a proposed Free Use Permit (FUP) to Yuma County Department of Public Works. This EA is a public document, and it is available for your review and comment. The proposed action analyzed in the EA would include portions of the following described public lands:

Gila and Salt River Meridian, Yuma County, Arizona

T. 10 South, R. 24 West,  
sec. 22, NE¼SE¼ (within)

The area described contains approximately 20.00 acres.

The intent of this EA is to analyze site specific environmental effects of a 20-acre FUP for the removal of an estimated 200,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel from approximately 20 acres of previously undisturbed lands south of Somerton, Yuma County, over a 10-year term. The material would be used for maintenance projects on County roads in the project vicinity over the next 10 years. The no action alternative would not authorize the proposed project. The proposed action would be in conformance with the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (RMP), as amended, February 1987.

Copies of the EA are available upon request from, and written comments may be submitted to, *Stephen Fusilier, 2555 E. Gila Ridge Road, Yuma, AZ 85365, (928) 317-3296*. This EA has also been posted on the Arizona State Office's web home page [http://www.az.blm.gov/env\\_docs/proj\\_list.htm](http://www.az.blm.gov/env_docs/proj_list.htm). The deadline for receipt of comments is August 31st. Public comments are welcome and encouraged.

By law, the names and addresses of those commenting are available for public review during regular business hours. However, individual commentors may request that their name and/or address be withheld from the record. These requests will be honored to the extent allowable by law. If you wish your name and/or address withheld, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment letter. All comments from organizations or businesses will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

Sincerely,  
Rebecca Heick  
Field Manager



# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Yuma Field Office  
2555 East Gila Ridge Road  
Yuma, AZ 85365  
www.az.blm.gov



### FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

#### For

#### EA No. AZ-320-2005-008

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Yuma Field Office, has analyzed a proposal from Yuma County for a Free Use Permit for the removal of an estimated 200,000 cubic yards of mineral materials from BLM lands near Somerton in Yuma County, AZ. The material would be used for maintenance projects on County roads in the project vicinity over the next 10 years. The FUP would be issued under the authority of Title III of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, as amended, and the Materials Act (Act of June 31, 1947, 30 U.S.C 601, *et seq.*). The proposed action and the No Action Alternative, are described within the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) No. AZ-320-2005-008.

The EA is tiered to and in conformance with the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and its Record of Decision, as amended (May 1986 and February 1987). The above referenced documents may be viewed at the Yuma Field Office during normal business hours.

The proposed action would assure that no significant adverse impacts would occur to the human environment in the following areas: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Cultural Resources, Environmental Justice, Farm Lands (Prime or Unique), Floodplain, Hazardous or Solid Waste, Native American Religious Concerns, Non-Native Invasive Species, Threatened or Endangered Species, Water Quality (Ground or Surface), Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, or Wilderness.

The proposed action does not significantly affect energy supply, distribution, and/or use and therefore a Statement of Adverse Energy Impact is not required.

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me as is summarized above, it is my determination that the Proposed Action does not constitute a major Federal Action affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

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Rebecca Heick  
Yuma Field Manager

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Date

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
EA-AZ-320-2005-008**

**FOR**

**YUMA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS  
SOMERTON MATERIAL SOURCE  
AZA 32602**

**TOWNSHIP 10 SOUTH, RANGE 24 WEST, SECTION 22  
YUMA COUNTY, ARIZONA**

**Prepared For:**

**Bureau of Land Management  
Yuma Field Office  
2555 East Gila Ridge Road  
Yuma, AZ 85365-2240**

**Prepared By:**

**Himes Consulting LLC  
3272 West Venice Way  
Chandler, AZ 85226**

**July 2005**

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## **1.1 BACKGROUND**

Yuma County has requested a Free Use Permit from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the removal of an estimated 200,000 cubic yards of mineral materials from BLM lands near Somerton in Yuma County, AZ. The material would be used for maintenance projects on County roads in the project vicinity over the next 10 years.

## **1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

The purpose of the action is to enable Yuma County to mine mineral materials at the Somerton Material Source for use on nearby Yuma County road maintenance projects. This pit is needed as the nearest pit that could provide similar material is approximately 50 miles away, north of Wellton.

## **1.3 CONFORMANCE WITH LAND USE PLANS**

The proposed action is in conformance with the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and its Record of Decision, as amended (May 1986 and February 1987), (page 13 – “The District would attempt to meet demands for common variety mineral materials, including sand, gravel and clay, through sale or free use permits on a case-by-case basis.”).

## **1.4 RELATED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS (EIS), ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS (EA), AND OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS**

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is tiered to the Yuma District Programmatic EA, No. AZ-050-78-26.

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**PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

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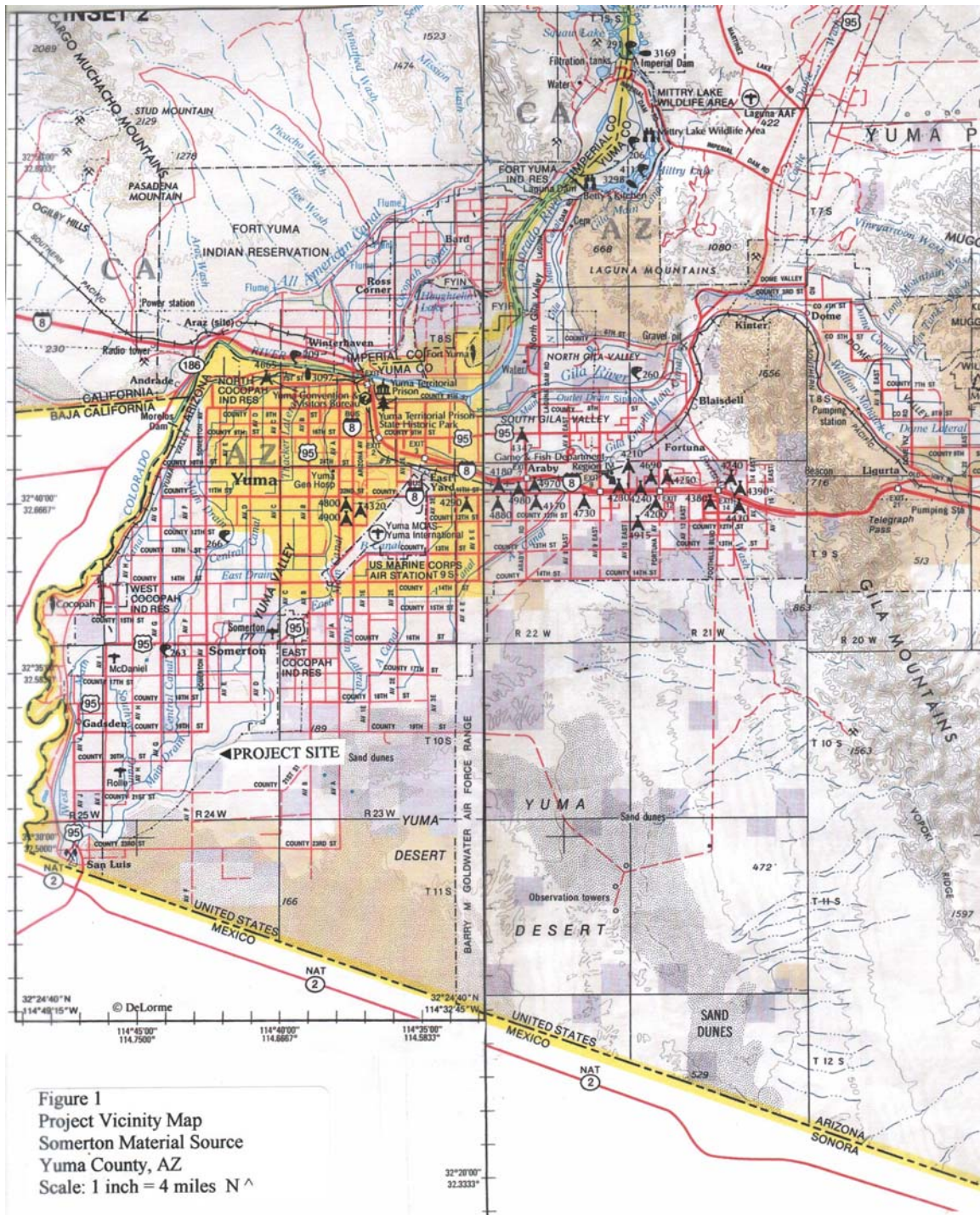
**2.1 PROPOSED ACTION**

Yuma County has requested a Free Use Permit to remove approximately 200,000 cubic yards of sand & gravel from approximately 20 acres of previously undisturbed lands south of Somerton, Yuma County, over a 10-year term. A vicinity map of the project area is provided in Figure 1. The affected lands are described as follows:

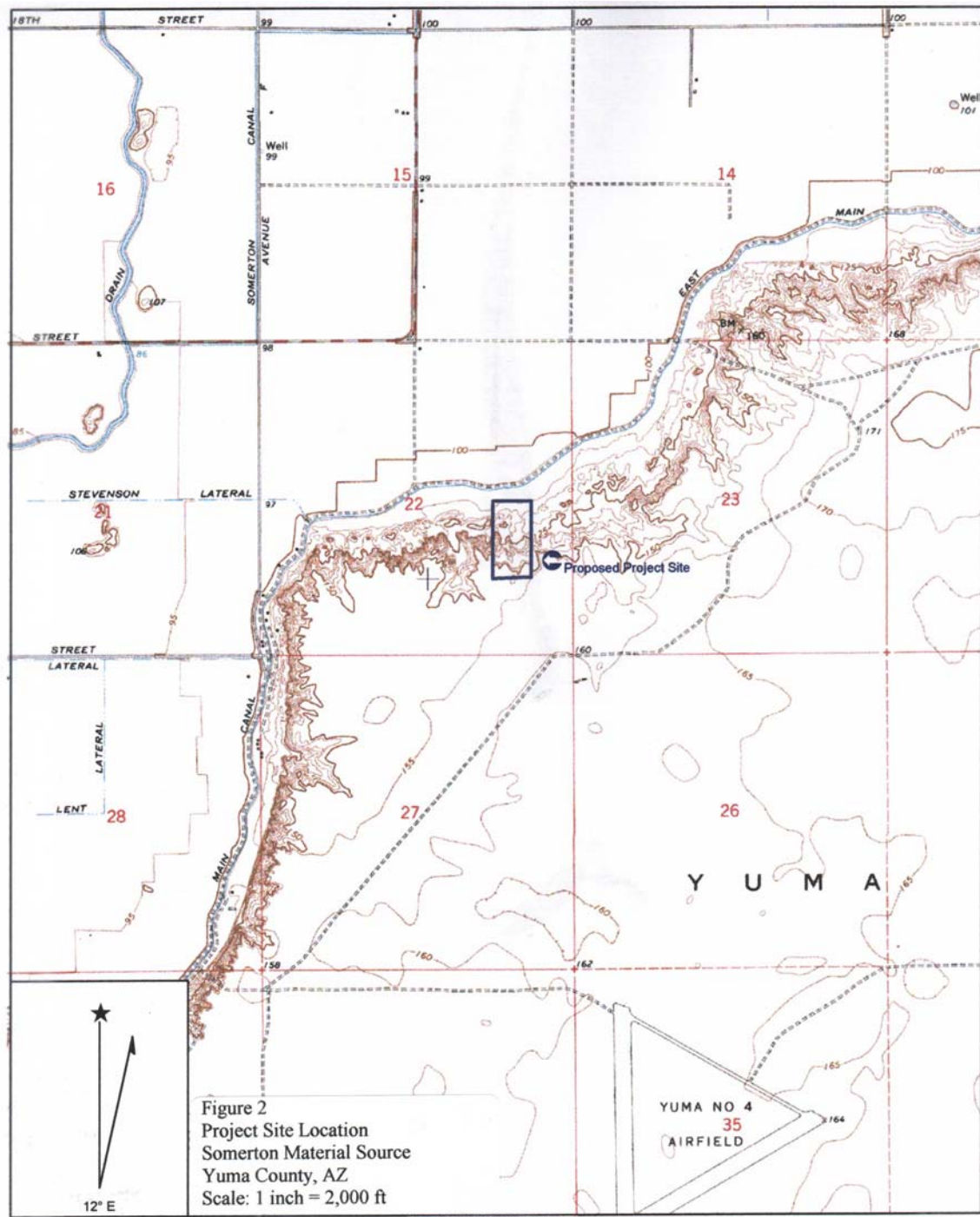
Gila and Salt River Meridian, Yuma County, Arizona  
T. 10 South, R. 24 West,  
Sec. 22, NE¼SE¼ (within)  
The area described contains approximately 20.0 acres.

The proposed permit area would encompass 20 acres, more or less. The location of the project site is shown in Figure 2. The project consists of mining and stockpiling materials, and transporting to the maintenance location using the existing access road. If approved, Yuma County would be required to comply with the following mitigating measures:

1. Any archaeological, historical, or paleontological remains discovered by the permittee, or any person working on the permittee's behalf, on public or Federal land shall be immediately reported to the Authorized Officer. All operations in the immediate area of such discovery shall be suspended until written authorization to proceed is issued by the Authorized Officer.
2. All firewood (vegetative material greater than three inches in diameter) shall be stockpiled in a place readily accessible by truck. The remaining brush shall be piled in piles less than three feet tall and no greater than 10 ft in diameter. These piles shall be placed in the reclaimed portions of the permitted areas.
3. The permittee shall furnish and apply water or use other means satisfactory to the Authorized Officer for dust control.







The site shall be maintained in a sanitary condition at all times; waste materials shall be disposed of promptly at an appropriate waste disposal site. "Waste" is defined as all discarded matter including, but not limited to, human waste, trash, garbage, refuse, oil drums, petroleum products, ashes, and equipment.

4. Public hazards caused by the operations shall be prevented by signs and/or appropriate fencing.
5. All applicable terms and stipulations of Standard Form 3600-9 and standard Yuma District material removal stipulations will apply.
6. Upon cessation of operations, the pit shall be scarified to a depth of 12 inches by rippers spaced 12 inches apart, in order to reduce compaction. Pit walls shall be maintained or graded to a final slope of 3:1 (horizontal : vertical).
7. If a desert tortoise is found in a project area, activities should be modified to avoid injuring or harming it. If activities cannot be modified, tortoises shall be moved from harm's way. Upon discovery of a desert tortoise in harm's way, the authorized biologist shall translocate the animal the minimum distance possible (but not more than two miles) within appropriate habitat to ensure its safety from death, injury, or collection associated with the project or other activities. The authorized biologist shall be allowed some discretion to ensure that survival of each relocated desert tortoise is likely. Desert tortoises shall not be translocated to lands outside the administration of the Federal government without the written permission of the landowner.

Only biologists authorized by the BLM and the appropriate State Fish and Game Department shall handle desert tortoises. Handling procedures for desert tortoises shall adhere to protocols outlined in the *Management Plan for the Sonoran Desert Population of the Desert Tortoise in Arizona* (December 1996).

## **2.2 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Alternatives to the proposed action consist of the No Action Alternative, which consists of not issuing a Free Use Permit to Yuma County for the Somerton material source by the BLM. Yuma County would not be able to repair County roads in the area with material from this source.

### **3.1 GENERAL SETTING**

The Somerton Material Source project site is located approximately six miles east of the Colorado River. Elevation at the project site is approximately 125 ft above mean sea level (msl). The East Main Canal occurs to the north of the site. The sandy gravel terrace in the southern portion of the project site leads to a downward slope (about 30 vertical feet) in the middle of the property to the stabilized sandy dunes in the northern portion of the property.

The majority of the property has been previously-disturbed by off-highway vehicle activities. Other land uses on the property include illegal dumping, hunting or practice shooting, and wildlife habitat.

Climate in the project area is typical of the arid southwest, which is characterized by long, hot summers and mild winters. Average annual rainfall is approximately three inches.

### **3.2 CULTURAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

Site AZ X:6:65 (ASM), the East Main Canal of the historic Yuma Project, is the only previously recorded cultural resource site within a mile radius of the project area. Transcon Environmental conducted a Class III cultural resources survey of the project area in October 2004. No archaeological sites or isolated artifacts/features were found within the project area (Transcon Environmental 2004).

### **3.3 VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The project area is within the Visual Resource Management Class IV. Class IV lands may contain contrasts to the basic landscape elements caused by the management action which make high levels of change to the existing landscape. The visual setting in the project area is dominated by broad views of the agricultural lands of the Yuma Valley to the north, the East Main Canal linear feature to the north and a powerline and the expanse of the Yuma Desert to the south. The existing area onsite used by off-road vehicles has altered the native character of the immediate project area.

### 3.4 VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE

Vegetation communities within the project vicinity are described as Lower Colorado River subdivision of the Sonoran Desert by Brown (1994). Biological surveys of the project site were conducted by J. Himes on October 12 and November 10, 2004. Vegetation within the stabilized sandy dunes in the northern, or lower, portion of the project site is dominated by shrubby mesquite (*Prosopis juliflora*), creosotebush (*Larrea tridentata*), four-wing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*) and seepweed (*Suaeda moquinii*). Russian thistle (*Salsola kali*) was also observed. Vegetation in this area has been previously-impacted by off-road vehicles. Vegetation on the slopes within the middle portion of the project site is very sparse and has been heavily impacted by off-road vehicles. Vegetation on the upper terrace in the southern portion of the project site is dominated by creosotebush and white bursage (*Ambrosia dumosa*). The Ajo lily (*Hesperocallis undulata*) was also fairly common throughout the northern portion of the project site.

Wildlife and/or wildlife sign observed in the area includes black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), whiptails (*Cnemidophorus* sp.), and the fringe-toed lizard (*Uma notata*), likely the Cowles fringe-toed lizard (*Uma notata rufopunctata*).

### 3.5 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) was contacted for a list of federally-listed, proposed, and candidate species which may occur in Yuma County. The BLM's Sensitive Species List (October 2000) of sensitive species which occur in the Yuma Resource Area was also reviewed. The Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) was contacted to access the Heritage Data Management System.

Based on the review of species lists and existing habitat information, the only federally-listed species that may occur in the project vicinity is the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). Occasional winter transients may occur in the vicinity of the project site, due to the proximity to the Colorado River. The project sites does not provide suitable roost sites for the bald eagle.

### **3.6 SOILS/MINERALS**

Both the surface and subsurface minerals are under federal ownership. The National Resources Conservation Service has mapped soils within the project site as Superstition Sand in the Yuma Desert (Soil Conservation Service 1980). This deep, excessively drained soil is on the old terrace of the Colorado River. The surface layer is typically light brown sand about 5 inches thick. Included with this soil in mapping are small areas of Rositas sand. Permeability of the Superstition sand is rapid. Surface runoff is very slow.

### **3.6 GRAZING**

No grazing occurs within or near the proposed project area (Mr. Roger Oyler, BLM, personal communication, 2004).

### **3.7 WILD HORSES AND BURROS**

Wild horses and burros do not occur within or near the project area (Mr. Roger Oyler, BLM, personal communication, 2004). Evidence of wild horses or burros was not observed during site surveys on October 12, 2004.

### **3.8 FLOODPLAINS**

The proposed project area does not occur within the 100-year floodplain of the Colorado River according to the FEMA Floodplain Map (FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map Panel No. 0400991050C).

### **3.9 AIR QUALITY**

Air quality in the project vicinity is usually high due to the remoteness from urban areas, but may decline for short periods because of blowing dust from unpaved roadways and agricultural burning in the vicinity. The project site is not located within a PM<sub>10</sub> non-attainment area.

### **3.10 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS**

No hazardous materials were observed during the site visit in October 2004.

### **3.11 INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES**

Russian thistle (*Salsola kali*), considered a noxious weed, was the only invasive non-native species observed within the proposed project area.

### **3.12 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice directs that programs, policies, and activities not have a disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effect on minority and low-income populations. The proposed project site is located approximately two miles south of the City of Somerton and one mile west of the western border of the East Cocopah Indian Reservation. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000), 95.2 percent of the population in Somerton is Hispanic and 26.6 percent of the population is at the poverty level. The East Cocopah Indian Reservation is also considered a minority community with some low-income populations.

### **3.13 NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS**

The Bureau of Land Management has initiated consultation for this project. The results of this consultation will be incorporated into the final Environmental Assessment.

**4.1 IMPACTS FROM THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The following critical elements were not present or would not be affected by the proposed action:

- Wetlands/riparian
- Prime or unique farmlands
- Wild and scenic rivers
- Grazing
- Floodplains
- Cultural resources
- Threatened or endangered species
- Wilderness
- Wild Horses or Burros

**4.1.1 CULTURAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

As no archaeological sites or isolated artifacts occur within the proposed project area, no impacts would occur to cultural or archaeological resources from the proposed action.

**4.1.2 VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The proposed action would be consistent with the objectives for Visual Resource Management Class IV. Proposed changes to the existing character of the landscape can be high.

**4.1.3 VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE**

Existing vegetation within the undisturbed portion of the project site would be removed during the mining process. Once mining is completed, reclamation of the material source would be scarified to allow natural revegetation. Wildlife within the proposed project area would be displaced during proposed project activities. Wildlife would be anticipated to return to the project area following reclamation and revegetation of the area.

#### **4.1.4 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES**

As the project site does not provide suitable roost sites for the bald eagle, the proposed project would have no effect on the bald eagle or its habitat. The area is potential Flat-tailed horned lizard habitat and compensation would be required.

Development of the proposed project site would impact 20 acres of potential foraging habitat for two BLM sensitive bat species: the big free-tailed bat and the California leaf-nosed bat. Based on the abundance of similar habitat types within the surrounding areas, impacts would not be anticipated to adversely impact these species on a regional basis.

Development of the project would reduce 20 acres of potential habitat for four BLM sensitive species: the cheeseweed moth lacewing, the Cowles fringe-toed lizard, the loggerhead shrike, and McNeill's sootywing skipper. Development of the project would also reduce six acres of potential habitat for the BLM sensitive sand food plant. Based on the abundance of similar habitat types within the surrounding areas, project impacts would not be anticipated to adversely impact the species on a regional basis.

#### **4.1.5 SOILS/MINERALS**

Construction and operation of the proposed action could result in the disturbance and alteration of 20 acres of undisturbed native soil and underlying minerals. Impacts to native soil and minerals would result from the clearing of protective vegetation, excavation of materials, and the associated loss of soil productivity in undisturbed areas.

Dust control would be provided on cleared areas on an as-needed basis to reduce dust generation and off-site deposition of soils from the project site. Scarification of project areas during reclamation would reduce impacts to soils over the long-term.

#### **4.1.6 GRAZING**

As no grazing occurs in the project vicinity, no loss of Animal Unit Months would occur from implementation of the proposed action.

#### **4.1.7 WILD HORSES AND BURROS**

As wild horses and burros do not occur in the project vicinity, no impacts would occur to wild horses and burros from the proposed action.



#### **4.1.8 FLOODPLAINS**

As the project site is not located within the 100-year floodplain, no impacts to the floodplain would occur.

#### **4.1.9 AIR QUALITY**

Short-term impacts to air quality would occur locally during excavation, processing, and hauling. Dust control would reduce these impacts during operation. Impacts to local air quality would be reduced over the long-term by the reclamation activities at the site. The project site is not located within a PM<sub>10</sub> non-attainment area.

#### **4.1.10 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS**

No hazardous materials were observed during site surveys of the project area. Operations would require the use of small amounts of hazardous materials (such as oil, grease, and anti-freeze). However, best management practices would be used during operations to minimize the potential for a spill. All materials would be removed following completion of operations.

#### **4.1.11 INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES**

Russian thistle, an invasive species, was observed within some disturbed areas of the proposed project site. Implementation of the proposed action may result in an expansion of Russian thistle to disturbed areas. The species is not anticipated spread to adjacent undisturbed areas based on existing conditions.

#### **4.1.12 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

The proposed project area is relatively isolated due to its remote location immediately adjacent to the Yuma Desert and south of the East Main Canal. As residences do not occur adjacent or within ½ mile of the proposed project area and the proposed operation is relatively small in scale, low-income and minority populations in the nearby City of Somerton and community of the East Cocopah Indian Reservation are not anticipated to be adversely impacted by the proposed action.

#### **4.1.13 NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS**

The Bureau of Land Management has initiated consultation for this project. The results of this consultation will be incorporated into the final Environmental Assessment.

#### **4.2 IMPACTS FROM THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Implementation of the No Action Alternative would result in a Free Use Permit being denied for the project site and no disturbance would occur within the proposed project area. As the need for materials for repair of County roads would not be fulfilled, Yuma County would need to find other material sources in the vicinity for their use.

#### **4.3 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

The proposed action would result in the extraction of up to 200,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel from the proposed project site over a 10-year period. The proposed action would add up to 20 acres of new disturbance to the previous disturbances in Yuma County. With this and other similar actions proposed by Yuma County, up to a total of approximately 110 acres of new disturbance would occur and potentially up to 1,600,000 cubic yards of material would be removed. New disturbance would add cumulatively to short-term impacts in the project vicinity, including impacts to soils, vegetation & wildlife, visual resources, and localized air quality. Reclamation would occur at the end of mining operations, which would aid in the long-term recovery of the project site. Implementation of the proposed action is therefore not expected to result in adverse cumulative impacts over the long-term.

**CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

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The following persons and agencies were contacted or consulted during preparation of this EA:

Federal

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Rob Wilson

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management, Yuma Field Office:

Stephen Fusilier, Team Lead, Lands and Minerals

Matthew Plis, Geologist

Sandra Arnold, Archaeologist

Jennifer Green, Natural Resource Specialist

Karen Reichhart, NEPA Coordinator

Roger Oyler, Rangeland Management Specialist

Ron Morfin, Visual Resource Management Specialist

Jeff Young, Wildlife Biologist

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

State

Arizona Department of Game and Fish

Arizona State Historic Preservation Office

Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team. December 1996. Management Plan for the Sonoran Desert Population of the Desert Tortoise in Arizona.

Brown, David E., 1994. Biotic Communities, Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico. University of Utah Press; Salt Lake City.

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1987. Yuma District Resource Management Plan. February.

Himes Consulting LLC. 2004. Biological Evaluation for the Somerton Material Source, Yuma County. Prepared for Yuma County. November.

USDA Soil Conservation Service. 1980. Soil Survey of Yuma-Wellton Area. Parts of Yuma County, Arizona and Imperial County, California. In Cooperation with the Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station and the California Agricultural Experiment Station.

Transcon Environmental. 2004. A Class III Cultural Resources Survey of Bureau of Land Management Administered Land in the Vicinity of Somerton, Yuma County, AZ. BLM Cultural Resource Project Record No. BLM-AZ-050-2004-077.

Federal Emergency Management Agency. Flood Insurance Rate Maps. [www.fema.gov/mapstore](http://www.fema.gov/mapstore)